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The Washington Post
The New York Times
The Washington Times
The Wall Street Journal
The Christian Science Monitor
New York Daily News
USA Today
The Chicago Tribune
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Webster Moves to Tighten CIA Rules

By Dennis Bell
Newsday Washington Bureau

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Washington — CIA Director William Webster said yesterday he plans to tighten internal controls at the nation's espionage agency in an effort to prevent unsanctioned operations that Congress would not approve and the American people would not understand.

In an unusual meeting with a group of reporters yesterday, Webster also said he had assigned two teams of agency analysts to read Bob Woodward's new book, "VEIL: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981-1987," to determine whether there were leaks that needed plugging or abuses by agency personnel that needed to be curbed.

He said that any major personnel changes, if they occur, would not come before mid-November, after an internal investigation of the Iran-contra affair has been completed and the congressional Iran-contra committee reports have been scrutinized.

Webster said he plans to upgrade the CIA's inspector general's office in an effort to coordinate the flow of information from specialized units. While saying he plans no major organizational changes at the agency he has headed for four months, Webster said it was difficult to "interface" between the specialized skill groups and that giving more power to the roving inspectors could improve management.

When asked if this was an effort to prevent rogue operations, Webster said, "I suppose . . . yes. I suppose that's the short answer." He added that it's better to have "ongoing control in management as opposed to going back and cleaning up." Webster hastened to stress that he was not criticizing the personnel of the agency he inherited from William Casey, who died. He did say that the CIA was "a little slow" in asserting itself in the Iran-contra affair. "There should have been more people asking why the NSC was running . . . that operation," Webster said, referring to the fact that former National Security Council aide Oliver North was in operational control of the disastrous arms-sale initiative.

And, without criticizing Casey, Webster said he would change some of Casey's practices. For example, Webster has refused to sit on the president's Cabinet and has said he will not be involved in policy decisions. He added yesterday that he will not allow CIA intelligence reports to be fine-tuned to fit administration political goals, which critics said was a frequent practice of Casey's.

But Webster defended Casey against charges by Woodward that Casey was aware of plans to funnel Iranian money to the Nicaraguan rebels months earlier than he admitted to Congress and set up private intelligence operations using foreign nationals and money supplied by allies. "I really think that's speculation."

Webster said he was "very skeptical" of Woodward's claims that Casey planned the assassination of a Lebanese Hezbollah leader and then arranged a bribe of the alleged terrorist when the assassination failed, both of which would have been illegal.

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